

**Testimony of Aimee Sycz, Support Coach for Horizons,
Incorporated, South Windham, Connecticut to the
Appropriations Committee
H.B. No. 6824 “AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET
FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND
MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND OTHER
PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE,” Specific to the DDS
Budget
March 6, 2015**

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and honorable members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Aimee Sycz, and I am a Support Coach at Horizons -- a private nonprofit agency located in South Windham. Our agency has been in operation for 36 years and provides individualized supports and services for people with special needs where they live, learn, work, and play. Horizons is a member of the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits.

I speak before you in opposition to H.B. No. 6824 “AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE,” specific to the DDS budget.

I recently read newspaper articles regarding the governor’s budget. Over the next two years the governor proposes cuts to the Employment and Day Services budget by \$30 million, Residential Services by \$23 million and new high school graduates programs by \$36 million; also, previous recessions are annualized – costing private providers \$21 million over those same two years.

These proposed budget cuts will have a shattering effect on my life and the lives of the people I support. These cuts reflect a sentiment in the government that the work I do is menial labor; however, I am here to tell this committee that the governor’s office grossly underestimates the value of my work. I am a skilled professional in my occupation of choice.

As a professional, I am required to have the following trainings: CPR, first aid, basic health, dysphasia, sign language, water/fire/safety skills, human rights, positive practices, hazardous materials, communicable disease control, defensive driving, abuse and neglect, THERAP documentation, agency policies and procedures, and physical and psychological management training.

Working for a nonprofit in human services essentially makes me a contracted employee of the State of Connecticut. Despite this relationship between the State and private

providers, Horizons' personnel reap far less benefits from the State than public employees. For instance, the final FY 2014 State budget included a 3 percent COLA for State employees in human services while private providers' personnel only saw a 1 percent increase in wages in the same budget. This 1 percent COLA was only given for half the year making it far less money for private providers' employees; in addition, after further rescissions in the State budget I actually received no COLA, so I took a net loss in wages over that time period.

In light of these facts, I ask this Committee, the Connecticut General Assembly, and Governor Malloy to discard the proposed cuts to DDS' budget. These proposed cuts threaten my economic security and would diminish private providers' ability retain well trained staff. I hope the Appropriations Committee considers my testimony when drafting their budget and when negotiating with OPM and the Governor about proposed budget cuts. Thank you.

My name is Emily Angeloff. I am an Office Assistant at Horizons. I am also a self-advocate member of the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Service Improvement Working Group, appointed by Governor Malloy. I also receive supports at work through Horizons. I receive supports at home 3 days a week through Interim. Based on the projected budget cuts, my life, and the lives of my friends would be greatly impacted. I rely on the funding I receive from the state to provide supports for me to be efficient at my job. Without this funding I wouldn't have a job and without a job I would have no income to support myself. I wouldn't have a social life because I would be at home alone. Cuts to funding for my home supports would impact my independence. This would include my activities of daily living such as bathing, doing laundry, and brushing my teeth. Transportation would also be impacted in budget cuts. My friends and I rely on either public transportation or funding through the agency for them to provide us transportation. This would impact our ability to go to work, grocery shopping, or doing something fun like meeting friends for coffee. I am fortunate enough that my family has a vehicle that is accessible for my chair; however my friends are not as fortunate. In talking to my friends I find that they share similar concerns about how their lives would be impacted if they couldn't go to work or lost their supports to perform their jobs. I have friends who lost the funding for their job and now they are stuck not making an income and searching for employment for weeks. My friends worry about having to rely on public transportation to work if the funding is cut from the agency to provide their transportation. Living in a rural area makes public transportation very limited. These are just a few concerns that my friends and I have in regards to the proposed budget cuts. With the cuts being so high in numbers it makes me feel like I am not a valued member of my community. Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony. Can I answer any questions you may have?